

## The Mech 5961

Chapter 5961 Dark Attack

Hyper technology had come a long way since the first year of the Age of Dawn.

Many scientists, engineers and mech designers collectively studied the new phenomena that emerged after the Red Ocean became bathed by exotic radiation.

Old families that retained ancient cultivation legacies also invested a lot of effort into deciphering the old texts for any solutions that could be applied in the modern era.

The combined efforts of these two groups resulted in blazingly fast advancement of hyper technology!

In one instance, the effectiveness of hyper technology increased by as much as 50 percent over a single quarter!

This extreme occurrence did not happen again, but it still served as a powerful reminder to everyone that hyper technology had a huge amount of untapped potential.

During the second year of the Age of Dawn, most mech designers and R&D teams no longer focused on attaining drastic performance gains. They had already picked all of the low-hanging fruit during the previous year.

What they sought to do instead was to explore the properties of specific hyper materials and develop unprecedented new design applications on the basis of their discoveries.

There were so many different E energy attributes out there that the list constantly expanded with each passing day.

Every new element translated into new possibilities. This led to a pattern of dispersal. A lot of researchers no longer tried to figure out how to perform new tricks with boring fire or water hypers anymore.

Instead, they sought to reduce the competition by studying more obscure hypers with attributes ranging from softness to delayed gratification.

This trend caused the field of hyper technology to undergo a rapid horizontal expansion. Now that it became much more difficult to achieve vertical progress, a lot of research institutions sought to make quick accomplishments by being the first to develop viable design applications for all kinds of strange and exotic elements.

Of course, the basic and fundamental ones such as the five classical elements still attracted a huge amount of attention. It was just that only the larger and more well-funded research institutions were able to remain competitive in these areas.

In any case, not many research institutions invested research into studying the darkness element.

There were a number of issues related to studying them. Darkness energy fell into the category of negative energy, which instantly repelled a lot of researchers.

Negative energy tended to affect people in a detrimental manner. People became angry, depressed, morose and even suicidal in a few cases.

Darkness tended to be more difficult to control than other elements due to its incredibly broad meaning and definition. It was tied to so many associations that it was easy for experiments to produce accidents because the manipulation of darkness energy produced radically different results than expected.

Further, the demand for hyper technology related to the darkness element tended to be skewed towards more covert and clandestine applications.

There was little honor and glory to be earned in this research direction. Many of the mech designers and research institutions assigned to explore the darkness element did so with the purpose of improving stealth mechs and all kinds of other unsavory devices.

This was why the darkness element already managed to earn a bad rep in the mech industry. Anyone who was depraved enough to incorporate darkness hypers in their mech designs was reckless at best, or deliberately malicious at worst!

Ves did not agree with this common sentiment. While he readily admitted that it was easy for flawed and weak-willed people to get corrupted by darkness, he believed he was exempt from this trap.

Since the last lightning tribulation event directly incorporated the darkness attribute to his nascent domain without any contamination, Ves gained a thorough comprehension of this element without any additional biases or other unpleasant baggage.

It was a remarkably pure and sterile way of embracing a new element. Though Ves could do little about the biases and associations he already possessed, they were not strong enough for him to treat darkness as a source of evil.

Instead, Ves recognized the amazing potential of this broad and versatile element. Its scattered meanings and chaotic collection of concepts provided a near-infinite amount of versatility. Darkness was so flexible and malleable that he could transform it into a wide range of design applications!

Unfortunately, Ves was limited by what he could do due to the physical constraints of reality.

Ves tried to explain this as succinctly as possible to Tusa.

"Now that my wife and I are finally making actual progress in reimagining your battle partner as an archemeh, a lot of capacity is freed up all of a sudden. It takes less parts and components to design an archemeh that performs almost identical to that of a conventional mech. This is one of the most compelling reason why we insisted on applying archetech to all of our expert mechs."

"What does this have to do with darkness?"

"A decent amount of space has become available in your mech design. We have already reallocated the newly available capacity into strengthening various areas such as armor plating, sensor systems and additional energy cells. Even after doing all of that, I made sure that there is still enough space left for darkness hyper materials. Your battle partner can accommodate one module that can add what we previously called a prime ability to your machine."

Venerable Tusa was very familiar with prime abilities. He employed them often enough during his own deployments.

"Okay. I can follow you so far. What are the limitations?"

"There are too many for me to explain in full." Ves sighed. "Darkness is an incredibly versatile element, but trying to express that in realspace is harder said than done. I need to identify and procure the right darkness-attributed hyper materials. They not only need to be resilient enough to withstand hard knocks, they also have to be of the highest grade in order to keep up with the growth of the Dark Zephyr for at least an entire mech generation. Lastly, most darkness hyper materials are much more suitable to be expressed in a specific manner. Not many variations of darkness hyper materials have been cataloged in the databases that I have access to. This will limit your options to an extent."

The projection of Venerable Tusa looked confused. "Tell me what I need to do in order to get this done."

Ves decided to simplify the decision-making process. Not everyone had the patience or the knowledge to appreciate the full scope of what he was trying to add to the Dark Zephyr.

"You need to state a preference. I already know you want to increase the offensive power of your machine, but there are multiple ways to do so by relying on the darkness element. How do you want to augment the attacks of the Dark Zephyr? Do you want your mech to concentrate his power and let it all out in a single explosive burst? Do you want to soften up large targets by spreading corrosive energies that can weaken any material it comes into contact with? Or do you want your expert mech to emit a psychic field that inflicts pain and suffering on the minds of every nearby enemy combatant?"

Tusa looked a bit overwhelmed.

"I never knew that you could realize all of these possibilities with the darkness element. I am not entirely sure what is best for the Dark Zephyr. You are the mech designer. You should know what is best."

Ves shook his head. "I know what I would choose based on the knowledge that I have, but there is no single best choice. There is only the most suitable choice."

"Is there a difference?"

"Yes. Each mech pilot is unique. What works well for you may not work well for another mech pilot. Let's do this. You already understand your expert mech in his current form, but think about the future of the Dark Zephyr. What should your mech stand for? Use your own words to describe what sort of impact the two of you should have on the battlefield."

The expert pilot began to envision a future version of the Dark Zephyr.

He dreamt that he had become an ace pilot.

He imagined that the Dark Zephyr kept up with him and became a much more powerful ace mech.

Once his new and upgraded machine entered onto the battlefield, it demonstrated a combination of speed and elusiveness that made it impossible for any alien warship gun to track the vast-moving machine.

However, moving fast was not enough for the Dark Zephyr to defeat all of his enemies. When the living mech approached an enemy ship, the machine mysteriously disappeared, only to appear right inside the transphasic energy shield envelope of the vessel!

Now that the Dark Zephyr entered into striking range of an enemy hull, the picture in Tusa's imagination started to get fuzzy.

How did Tusa want his expert mech to cripple or destroy the enemy warship?

Should he pursue speed and somehow force the Dark Zephyr to overexert himself and burst out with a powerful energy release?

Should he pursue efficiency and let the Dark Zephyr circle around to cripple all of the easily accessible weak points of the vessel?

"Don't think about what is best, or what is most efficient." Ves continued to provide guidance. "Let your mind go free. Better yet, let Blackwing's mind go free as well. Try to imagine how you would like your Dark Zephyr to crush the enemies in your way. Do you want to be subtle or discreet, or do you want to sow terror and discord? Do you want to inflict mass destruction, or do you want to be surgical and precise?"

As Tusa continued to take in these words, he began to imagine different scenarios for the Dark Zephyr.

Many of them showed different ways his living mech could inflict damage onto a large and sturdy target like an alien warship.

While the products of his imagination all looked cool in different ways, the images did not resonate with him. This showed that this was not how he wanted to channel the power of darkness.

"Chip! Chip!"

Since Tusa found it difficult to come up with an image, he began to lean more towards Blackwing, who embodied the darkness element on his behalf.

The companion spirit entertained a handful of different ideas before fixating his mind on one specific means of attack.

Tusa imagined the Dark Zephyr dancing his way towards a large alien battleship, evading every intercepting attack that tried to stop the ace mech's approach.

When his battle partner came close enough, Tusa performed the Leap of True Freedom technique, enabling the expert light skirmisher to bypass the energy shield layers as if they did not exist.

The scenario up to this point was familiar to him. What was new this time was that the Dark Zephyr did not stop.

The machine made no attempts to reduce his forward momentum nor try to circle around the hull of the enemy vessel.

Instead, the living ace mech continued to charge forward to the point where he was on the verge of crashing directly into the hull!

Ace mech or not, Saint Kingdom or not, the Dark Zephyr at this level would not be able to withstand this ruinous impact without incurring damage, not at this speed and the thickness of the enemy hull structure.

Yet instead of producing the expected result, the Dark Zephyr somehow turned into a shadowy phantom and phased right through the hull of the enemy vessel!

A blink of an eye later, the Dark Zephyr managed to emerge out of the opposite side of the hull, where he promptly transformed back into his corporeal form.

A quick Leap of True Freedom later, the expert light skirmisher deftly bypassed the intact transphasic energy shield on the other side and went on his way.

In the meantime, the 'tunnel' in the structure of the enemy warship that the Dark Zephyr just managed to pass through started to darken and weaken before collapsing entirely!

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Secondary explosions engulfed the weakened sections, causing the ship to suffer crippling damage that ended her participation in the battle!

This was an amazing scenario.

Yet Tusa and Blackwing were not done.

It turned out that the alien warship was not floating in space by herself, but instead lined up in a row of over a dozen identical battleships.

This neat formation proved to be the alien fleet's downfall as the Dark Zephyr continued to pass through each of the warships in a single straight line!

It took a remarkably short time for the blazingly fast ace mech to reach the opposite end of the formation!

Seconds later, all of the remaining warships began to partially collapse while becoming beset by their own secondary explosions!

In just a single attack run, the Dark Zephyr singlehandedly crippled 12 alien battleships!

"This... this it. This is it! This is what the Dark Zephyr should become! My battle partner should become a mech that neutralizes everything in his path. My machine shall become the ominous wind that leaves only darkness in his wake!"

Chapter 5962 Fight Close or Die Trying!

Of all of the possible ideas that Tusa could come up with, Ves did not expect him to turn his own machine into a weapon onto himself.

The sequence that Tusa had created in his mind was bold and surprisingly daring.

It was also an exceedingly dangerous fantasy that was already giving Ves headaches!

How the hell was he supposed to turn this dream into reality?!

Tusa clearly noticed Ves' distress.

"My apologies, cousin. I... did not limit my imagination. My emotions and desires got the better of me. It is silly of me to ask you to turn the Dark Zephyr into a phantom missile that can weaken everything he passes through."

Ves raised his palm. "No, it's okay. I was asking for this. You have given me exactly what I wanted to hear. Whether it is unrealistic or not is not a critical issue. High-ranking mechs and mech pilots

are known for defying reality. Even if you cannot destructively phase through an enemy warship at your current strength, the story might be different a few years later."

"Are you saying... you can actually make my daydream come true?"

"There is a chance." Ves grinned. "It is not going to be easy. I have roughly broken down the components of the operation of this hypothetical special move. I need to gather multiple different hyper materials and combine them in a way that allows them to act in unison. I probably won't be able to solve all of the technical problems alone, so I will need to consult with the Red Association for technical support."

"Will that delay the completion of my project?!" Tusa asked with clear concern in his voice.

He had already been waiting for a long time for the promised upgrade to the Dark Zephyr. If it got delayed yet again, he would probably decay into a skeleton by the time the perfectionist mech designers were done with their work!

"I am not going to delay the project any further. I am confident that I can solve all of the technical challenges." Ves quickly placated Tusa. "The main issue is that you are probably not strong enough to enable the Dark Zephyr to destructively phase through the hull of a single alien battleship, let alone multiple of them. You will likely need to advance to an ace mech before you can do that, and even then the consumption will be terribly high. It is a great way to inflict an instant and catastrophic blow to powerful alien battleships and maybe phase leaders alike."

It was clear that Tusa's persistent fixation on his lack of attack power prompted him to overcompensate.

He wanted his Dark Zephyr to deviate from the pattern of a classical light skirmisher and gain a killer move as a trump card!

As Ves continued to estimate the steps he needed to complete to make this move possible, he became more certain that he would be able to get the job done within the deadline.

He had learned so much about hyper technology and E-technology during the last lightning tribulation.

He had also grown stronger and more competent in designing mechs. The all-around improvement produced by the lightning baptism had given him just enough courage to tackle this critical side project!

Tusa looked ambivalent though. There was a part of him that truly yearned to turn his own speed and shadow as his weapons. There was also another part of him that believed his idea was too outrageous to be realized in his upgraded expert mech.

"We don't have to start big right away." Ves gently said as he activated a projection that played out a very rough simulation of the proposed attack method. "We can start on a smaller and more modest scale. You won't be able to phase through something as big as an alien battleship, but you should be able to do so with a sub-capital ship."

The projected scenario showed the Dark Zephyr complete six steps in very quick succession.

"The first step was the approach."

No matter whether the living mech followed an evasive pattern or just sped forward in a straight line, the Dark Zephyr still possessed no significant ranged capabilities aside from any compact firearms that he might carry.

"Before I continue, do you want to equip your living mech with a pistol or something?" Ves asked. "The high-tier expert mech version has enough power and capacity to equip mounted or handheld ranged weapons. I highly recommend you do so as it will plug an obvious weakness. This is an especially viable choice once the Dark Zephyr is upgraded to a first-class ace mech when the conditions allow for it. Your living machine will become so powerful at that time that he can integrate a whole suite of ranged armaments."

Narrow specializations was the norm in third-class and second-class combat. Mech pilots at this level were unable to handle too much complexity and maintain their full combat effectiveness.

Mech models that tried to do too much stuff at once always became mediocre in everything. The only way to avoid this outcome was by raising the price of the mechs to a ridiculous height.

These limitations applied to high-ranking mechs as well, but they became increasingly less relevant as they grew in power and rank.

The Dark Zephyr happened to reach a point where he could take the first steps into transitioning into a first-class multipurpose light mech.

The enormous design budget and the advantages brought by a full archemech conversation freed up a lot of capacity, creating enough room to support a couple of reasonably combat and efficient ranged armaments!

Sure, the Dark Zephyr would never be able to match the performance of the likes of the Amaranto or the Promethea in terms of ranged combat, but that was not the point.

Ves just wanted to give the light mech the ability to retaliate against enemies at range in case it was truly necessary.

Though Ves found this to be a logical choice, Venerable Tusa obviously looked conflicted.

He originally started off as a third-class mech pilot. His entire education centered around learning the basics before committing to a single specialization to the very end.

There was even less tolerance for third-class mech pilots to dabble into other mech types.

They were allowed to mess around with other mech types in simulations and occasionally live practice sessions, but once they needed to deploy in the field for real, they were all expected to stick to the mech types that they excelled at the most!

In hindsight, Joshua already managed to stand out as a ridiculously versatile mech pilot at the time. He may not have been the best at either melee or ranged combat, but gaining enough proficiency in both to handle himself in battle was a true testament of his talent and determination!

Second-class mech pilots tended to be a little more loose with regards to specialization. The elites usually benefited from advanced augmentations that increased their learning efficiency and gave them the opportunity to branch out a little further.

If Tusa was raised as a second-class mech pilot, then he would have said yes to the suggestion already.

Unfortunately, old habits die hard.

"The Dark Zephyr has always been a light skirmisher to me." Tusa eventually replied. "I do not think I am as extreme as Venerable Dise in this, but I think my mech is ultimately the strongest in my hands when my battle partner sticks to his original archetype. I know enough about mechs to understand that adding any additional weapon system will impose burdens onto the machine. I do not want to gain a safety net at the cost of making my expert mech slower and less fragile. I think it is better to stick to what I am best at and follow that through the end."

This was not an entirely unexpected answer. Expert pilots tended to be really stubborn and willful, and that often extended to their approach towards combat.

A very famous example of this was General Axelar Streon. He could have switched to piloting a proper first-class multipurpose ace mech a long time ago, but he continued to insist on piloting a machine that only had two weapon systems.

Two weapon systems!

In the first-class mech community, that was just a single step above piloting a combat mech without any armaments!

An even more renowned example was the Destroyer of Worlds. The former second-class mech pilot always insisted on piloting a machine that was configured as a heavy artillery mech.

Though the Ragnarok contained a lot of hidden weapons and other nifty features, it was abundantly clear that the famous god mech was still an artillery mech in essence!

In both cases, the pilots in question made their suboptimal decisions work. They had fought much of their lives without relying on additional modules or a luxurious collection of weapon systems. They still managed to prove their superior combat prowess while continuing to limit their options.

These high-ranking mech pilots were not stupid. Ves suspected that sticking to the original mech type may be part of a ritual of sorts.

Mech pilots who remained firm in their hearts found it easier to strengthen their convictions and remain true to themselves.

Venerable Tusa never struck Ves as a particularly driven or intense expert pilot, but the man had his own persistence.

"I wish you good luck in that, then." Ves said as he reached out to pat the physical projection's shoulder. "Getting back to the original topic, the sequence as you have described earlier has six steps in total. I already mentioned the first one."

The second one was to use the Leap of True Freedom to enable the Dark Zephyr to move unhindered, even if there was a transphasic energy shield in the way!

The third was to keep charging forward while initiating the technique that allowed the Dark Zephyr to fly right through the hull of the enemy warship!

The fourth step was to emerge from the other side of the hull while hoping that the expert mech did not incur any damage along the way.

The fifth step was to initiate the Leap of True Freedom in a very short interval of time.

The sixth step was for the Dark Zephyr to speed away from the initial target after emerging on the other side of transphasic energy shields that were probably still active at the time.

It would probably take a short time after that before the damage inflicted by the destructive phasing attack run truly started to catch up with reality!

Trying to incorporate all six steps into the Dark Zephyr Mark III sounded like an enormous undertaking, but the steps were mirrored from each other. Ves only needed to figure out how to implement three major mechanisms before changing them together to form a viable offensive ability.

Ves relished in the challenge. His mastery in hyper technology and E-technology gave him enough assurances that he should be able to cobble together a basic version of what Tusa envisioned.

So long as the initial proof of concept worked, Ves would have all of the time he needed to expand and improve upon his design application!

Tusa began to get swayed by Ves' confidence. "Are you truly sure about this? Can you add a killer feature to my Dark Zephyr?"

"I can, but it will take up all of the remaining capacity on your expert mech. I won't be able to add any other features to your battle partner anytime soon. The only ways for the Dark Zephyr to defeat his opponents is by knifing them with his blades, tossing grenades like they cost nothing or initiate this incredibly risky but rewarding phasing attack."

All of these attack methods were only effective at closer ranges!

Even if Venerable Tusa turned into an ace mech and gained the ability to inflict damage through his Saint Kingdom, it still wouldn't amount to much. Tusa and the Dark Zephyr were destined to fight their enemies up close or die trying!

#### Chapter 5963 Destructive Phasing

Ves ended his call shortly after he promised to add this exceptionally powerful capability to the Dark Zephyr.

He did not make this promise lightly. He might not be a willpower cultivator, but he still valued his integrity as a mech designer. Ves wanted to make a serious commitment to Venerable Tusa in order to soothe the expert pilot's fears about subsequent delays and scrapping of features.

Managing relationships with high-value clients was part of a mech designer's job. Tusa had clearly been more badly affected by all of the delays than normal. Ves felt responsible for this, so he deliberately subjected himself to a hard deadline to ensure he went all-out into elevating the combat power of the Dark Zephyr.

Of course, the consequences of failure were extremely serious. An irreparable break would form in the relationship between Ves and Tusa. Ves would also have to bear the stain on his professional career for the rest of his life.

It was a lot safer if he kept everything vague and expressed a lot of uncertainty.

Ves did not want to do that. It was a cowardly approach that was helpful in avoiding responsibility, but also pushed him into becoming more complacent.

So long as Ves had sufficient confidence in his ability to complete the job, he believed it was best to be bold and make sure he tried his best!

Even if he fell a little short of his goals, he could at least be satisfied that he had done his absolute best in fulfilling the demands of his client.

Ves was completely satisfied with how he handled his discussion with Tusa.

That was not necessarily the case for other people. When he dropped by the design lab to inform his wife of this latest development, she almost dropped from her seat!

"WHAT?!"

Alexandria reacted with just as much shock!

"Maaw!?"

The news dropped so hard that the Queen Cat interrupted her design network. Gloriana quickly lost her spiritual connection to Hekkel. Her Archglove began to generate friction sounds as she pressed her covered fingers together.

The enslaved arche engineer cowered and quickly took a few steps back in order to distance himself from his Glorious Queen's wrath.

Surprisingly enough, Gloriana did not blow up and unleash a full volume tirade at Ves!

He expected this to happen and had psychologically prepared for this in advance.

Gloriana would grow upset that Ves had introduced a significant deviation from the current design plan and tell him that he was being absolutely stupid for listening to his impulses.

She would eventually cool down and reluctantly accept that Ves would have his way, though she certainly would not sound pleased by this course of events.

Once they completed the project and Ves managed to prove that his inspired idea worked out, Gloriana would forget that she ever objected to Ves in the first place and just accept that this additional change was part of her original master plan all along.

Ves and his wife had repeated this cycle so often that he expected that he would go through the motions for the umpteenth time.

Instead, her justified anger made way for acceptance.

Yes, acceptance.

"You... you're okay with my proposal?"

"Maaw." Alexandria calmly replied.

"I am." Gloriana said. "Do not get me wrong. I am displeased at having to revise our planning and change our assignments. You could have explored this feature in a much earlier phase of our upgrade project. Trying to tack it on midway is not supposed to happen."

"You're wrong, Gloriana. The Ves before he went on his business trip wouldn't have gained the confidence to realize this powerful new ability. The Ves that came back from the Dominion of Man is a lot better. I have gained a lot of new capabilities, and this is just right as my first true attempt at harnessing one of my newfound powers."

"You certainly do not lack confidence. I have learned that you usually end up reaching your goal when that is the case. You have proven yourself enough times to earn the benefit of the doubt from me. I do not have a single clue how you can enable Venerable Tusa and the Dark Zephyr to rapidly execute the six steps that you have outlined, but I do not dare to underestimate you again. If you could do the impossible by transforming the Dominion of Man into a living dreadnought, then you should probably be able to improve the Dark Zephyr's offensive power by a large extent."

Though this conversation did not unfold as he anticipated, this was not a bad outcome. Ves smiled and moved forward in order to embrace her in a heartfelt hug.

"Thank you for trusting me. I will do my best not to fail or delay the completion of the Dark Zephyr Project. I will even set aside my other duties if I need to invest more time than usual."

Now that the anticipated conflict did not occur, Ves and Gloriana sat down and began to revise their current design.

The two worked to explore their options and identify the most suitable darkness-attributed hyper materials to integrate in the mech design.

"The so-called destructive phasing technique of yours has never been created before." Gloriana said with a frown as she looked at a dozen different screens. Each of them was connected to a different database. "The closest equivalent I can find is references to 'shadow missiles' that are able to phase far deeper into the hulls of alien warships. The difference is that these missiles were never designed to exit their targets."

Ves turned on his seat and glanced at the projection that showed a recording of the missiles in action.

"It's not the same." He said. "These missiles make use of the shadow element. What I need to employ is the darkness element."

"Are they not practically the same?"

"Their definitions are too far apart from each other. They definitely exist as separate concepts." Ves explained. "That said, shadow can be treated as a derivative of darkness, so it is technically possible to mix and match the two together so long as you are precise enough."

"Why do you want to make use of the darkness element rather than the shadow element? The latter may be narrower in meaning, but that also makes it easier for us to shape into the desired form."

"I need the versatility and breadth of options of the darkness element." Ves patiently explained to his wife. "What Tusa is asking from us is anything but simple. Shadow alone won't cut it. If I want to limit this ability to a single element, then only darkness can be stretched to fulfill all three core mechanisms of the destructive phasing ability."

Even then, Ves needed to make heavy use of phasewater to enable the actual phasing process and strengthen it to a massive extent.

"Since there is no existing license or design that you can reference, you will need to develop the necessary parts and modules from scratch. Are you up to the task, Ves?"

"Sure. I once made the Geist System completely by myself, remember? Hyper technology and E-technology fall within my specialties. I pioneered these fields long before the start of the Age of

Dawn. With the help of my new improvements, I think I can whip a solution together within the deadline."

The Geist System, while impressive in its own right, was far from comparable to this new function in complexity and integration.

Ves could not do it alone. He needed to obtain additional information on how to induce the frame of a high-ranking mech into a state that enabled it to pass through an entire starship without actually crashing into anything.

This was impossible, but then again so was the Leap of True Freedom.

One of the reasons why he was confident that it would work out anyway was because the willpower of a powerful enough expert pilot often helped to plug any gaps.

The Tusa of half a decade ago was completely unqualified to pull off an insane stunt like this. The Tusa that was promoted to a high-tier expert pilot with the help of general cultivation elixir was just powerful enough to succeed!

Ves had no confidence he could implement a comparable function in a standard mech. He needed to implement a lot more rigor and precision in his work, which was an impossible demand to meet at this time.

While Ves still had a long way to go before he could fully flesh out the new feature of the Dark Zephyr, his wife tentatively approved of his early efforts.

"I can see that you have a definite plan in mind." She said. "Thematically, this attack ability fits the Dark Zephyr remarkably well. It makes up for the living mech's lackluster attack power in a form that makes sense. Speed is of the essence. Each time Venerable Tusa decides to initiate a destructive phasing attack, he is gambling with his life and the life of his battle partner. If the two of them do not exit a hull in time, they risk phasing back into the main dimensions in advance, causing them to become superimposed with any matter that is already present."

She did not need to explain that this was a fatal outcome.

It seemed that the Dark Zephyr could not escape the common weakness of light mechs.

Their margin of error was much lower compared to other mechs!

Ves never intended for destructive phasing to turn into the Dark Zephyr's first resort. Venerable Tusa needed to show restraint and only pull it off when the Larkinsons became embroiled in a serious battle.

When the continued survival of powerful enemy warships resulted in constant losses to the Larkinson Army, then it was more than worthwhile for Venerable Tusa to employ his trump card to remove an enemy vessel off the board!

However, the consumption and associated risks were much greater at the high-tier expert mech stage.

Venerable Tusa really needed to advance to ace pilot and acquire a powerful Saint Kingdom in order to unlock the full-powered version of this new attack ability.

His latest escapades had given Ves a much greater insight and understanding of domains.

The Saint Kingdoms of ace pilots was truly capable of defying reality to a large extent!

This was especially the case when they acted upon the ace mechs themselves. The sheer willpower of a determined enough ace pilot was already enough to selectively bend and break a few rules!

That was not the extent of what was possible. Saint Kingdoms were mere babies in front of God Kingdoms. Ves could do way more than turn the Dark Zephyr into a debilitating projectile if Tusa had the power of a god pilot!

Unfortunately, his god mech had nothing to do with Ves if that was the case. A Senior Mech Designer was not qualified to work on a genuine god mech!

Though Ves really hoped that Tusa and his battle partner would be able to transcend into godhood as a fused entity, it was too early for him to consider this possibility.

The pair still needed to overcome their latest hurdle, and that was waiting for Ves and Gloriana to succeed in upgrading the Dark Zephyr into a powerful machine!

"Yes."

"Yes, my dear?"

"If you are able to realize this insane ability, then I think that the Dark Zephyr may suddenly turn from one of the weakest to the most powerful expert mechs in our clan!"

"You truly think so, honey?"

"If the Dark Zephyr can 'destructively' phase through a warship, then he should be able to do the same to phase whales, other expert mechs and more. No wall or obstacle is safe anymore. There is no need for him to carry a bandolier of grenades anymore. His own mech frame has become his most threatening weapon."

Ves smiled. "I have high hopes for this as well, but don't forget that the Dark Zephyr actually has to get close before he can initiate an attack run. Once our enemies start to figure out the details of our expert mechs, I think it will become much harder for Tusa to enjoy free reign."

#### Chapter 5964 Advanced Hyper Module

The development of the Dark Zephyr Mark III consumed much of Ves and Gloriana's attention.

Ves had not made life easier for himself after he took it upon himself to add destructive phasing to the Dark Zephyr's capabilities.

He did not mind. He relished the additional challenge. It was precisely because no one had managed to pull it off that he became so passionate about trying to turn it into reality.

Destructive phasing was a form of hyper technology that went beyond the more basic applications. It was a way of manipulating E energy to produce a result that affected reality a lot more than enhancing the defenses of a transphasic energy shield or increasing the damage of a laser beam.

This time, Ves not only wanted to create a condition where the Dark Zephyr was able to phase his entire frame, but also leave a wake of corrupting energies behind his passage that weakened everything it touched!

Neither of these effects were easy to realize. Ves knew he needed to involve multiple disciplines in order to make it all possible. Aside from that, he needed to make serious gains in deepening the application of hyper technology in relation to the darkness attribute.

Ves could only count on himself for this! Very few mech designers and researchers conducted any academic research on this ominous element, and the few R&D institutions that explored it for the purpose of developing better stealth technology often hoarded their findings to deny their enemies and rivals the same advantages.

"This is going to be a test of my own ingenuity and mastery of hyper technology."

Ves needed to leverage his newly obtained affinity in darkness really hard in order to generate useful gains. The harsh deadline meant that he needed to make constant progress in doing so. He could not afford to make the wrong guesses and waste much of his time on experiments that ended up in failure.

He already ordered a large batch of medium and high-grade darkness hypers. Once they got delivered to Diandi Base, he intended to explore and experiment on them right away in order to make progress on the hardware front.

However, Ves never considered the hardware aspect of the speculative Destructive Phasing Module to pose the greatest hindrance.

They were merely the building blocks. The true challenge lay in combining them together into a functional device and programming it to perform the right functions

This was where the entire setup strayed into E-technology, or spiritual engineering as he used to call it. Despite specializing in this field, much of his design applications only indirectly affected the material realm.

The imaginary realm was the imaginary realm.

The material realm was the material realm.

Stuff that happened in one realm rarely affected the other realm. Even if it did, the effects were usually rather slight.

This rule became increasingly looser and less relevant when powerful cultivators got involved in a battle.

This was why it mattered so much whether Venerable Tusa was a high-ranking expert pilot or a junior ace pilot.

The two ranks may be adjacent to each other, but there were massive differences in how extensively they could employ their willpower!

This job would have been a lot easier if Tusa had already become a Saint.

That was unlikely to happen in the short term. Under normal circumstances, he should have been a mid-tier expert pilot by this time.

It was only because Ves managed to wrangle a lot of general cultivation elixirs out of the Red Association that Tusa along with all of the other Larkinson expert pilots were able to grow their resonance strengths at least an order of magnitude faster than normal.

They were worth all of the expense!

However, Ves also understood that expert pilots who did not grow stronger on a gradual basis possessed weaker foundations than before.

They were unaccustomed to their newfound strength. Their boost in power had come so quickly that they needed to spend years of adaptation before they could truly master their strength as ace mech candidates.

In addition to these shortcomings, their mental growth and polishing had also fallen behind. The elixirs might do weird stuff that exerted a heavy load on their willpower, but that was no substitute for introspection, self-discovery and other activities that exerted a formative effect on their willingness to fight.

It was not impossible for less experienced high-tier expert pilots to spontaneously complete all of these necessary steps and break through on the spot, but this only happened under exceptional circumstances.

Given what Ves knew about Tusa, he feared that the light skirmisher specialist became so obsessed with the promised upgrade of his Dark Zephyr that he had fallen into the same trap that afflicted the likes of Patriarch Reginald Cross and General Ark Larkinson.

Ace pilot candidates often struggled to break through their bottlenecks throughout their entire careers. It was agonizing for them to remain stuck in the same place when they previously made a lot of progress in growing their resonance strength.

The lack of feedback from continued growth caused a lot of expert pilots to gradually doubt themselves. This was in itself a fatal blow to their chances of triggering their second apotheosis.

Peak expert pilots who continually failed to break their limits came up with all sorts of rationalizations to excuse their lack of forward progress.

Blaming their inability to break through on their inadequate expert mechs was a common excuse. It also happened to be true in many cases.

Venerable Tusa's situation was therefore salvageable so long as the Larkinson Clan worked to upgrade his machine to a much higher standard.

The trap was not even a detriment if handled correctly. Delivering the Mars induced so much euphoria in Patriarch Reginald that he broke through right after receiving his precious Mars!

The fact that General Ark Larkinson failed to break through after he received the Lionheart and piloted his new battle partner for a while was a disconcerting sign.

Either his talent was not as good as Ves expected, or it was simply because he still lacked sufficient tempering.

Even if the rate of breakthroughs had started to increase ever since exotic radiation came into the picture, mech pilots still had to endure a lot of hardships in order to fight their way upwards.

A powerful masterwork mech alone was not a guarantee for a breakthrough. It just lowered the threshold to a more attainable level. The cold hard truth was that Uncle Ark did not deserve to become an ace pilot in his current state.

"It makes sense more or less." Ves murmured. "Patriarch Reginald was a lot older when he became an ace pilot. He also led his Cross Clan through a time of betrayal and extinction, all while grieving for the loss of his powerful father."

Ves did not like Patriarch Reginald's personality at all, but it was exactly due to his stubbornness and his strong urge to stick to his own views that he took another major step in his path to godhood.

According to his current understanding of the mech piloting profession, Ves deduced that the main quality that a mech pilot needed in order to accomplish the impossible feat of becoming a god pilot was to unswervingly stick to their sense of self when the entire cosmos sought to turn them into something different!

This was why Venerable Tusa did not actually develop all that much when he started to practice the Shadow Dance. Eating the enlightenment fruit may have contaminated the expert pilot with the power of darkness, but it was not an element that resonated with him particularly well.

His developing domain was largely based on the freedom attribute, which could be considered a subclassification of the wind attribute.

"If that is all there is to Venerable Tusa, then it would do him a great amount of harm by forcing him to embrace the power of darkness."

Mech pilots were always capable of change and growth. It was not impossible for them to acquire new specializations and develop a liking for new elements.

Ves had already heard that Venerable Jannzi had already built up a great affinity for gravity, for example.

It was much worse than Tusa, who actively resisted the embrace of darkness. The pilot was too upright and honorable to stomach the idea of skulking about in the shadows. He was much different from Venerable Zimro Belson in this regard.

This was exactly why companion spirits mattered so much!

Though Ves did not create them with this specific application in mind, Tusa was able to make use of the power of shadows without compromising on his personality and principles because it was his companion spirit that embodied this element!

It sounded rather absurd when a companion spirit was just an extension of a person that had been seeded with a split personality.

Yet the separation between a person and a companion spirit was just enough for them to count as two separate individuals in certain cases, and the same person in other cases!

"It's just like the wave-particle duality of quantum mechanics!"

Light was neither a wave or a particle. It was something else that exhibited the traits of either of them in different situations.

Companion spirits worked in a similar vein. It behaved in a way that made the most sense in a specific context.

"It's essentially a cheat! Tusa can have his cake and eat it too! How brilliant!"

Ves couldn't help but mentally pat his own back for creating such a miraculous invention. The fact that the Destroyer of Worlds relied so heavily on Emma was a powerful example of how extensively his companion spirits could augment the power of every mech pilot!

This was also why the Red Association accepted the existence of companion spirits despite how subversive they were and tried to propagate them as much as possible.

What mattered now was that Ves believed that the existence of Blackwing played a pivotal role in making the Destructive Phasing Module work under the current conditions.

In a situation where neither Tusa nor Blackwing reached the second major cultivation rank, the latter needed to imbue the aforementioned module and channel all of his power into it to produce a strong enough effect.

"I can make this work."

The design of the advanced hyper module was critical. It not only needed to combine all of the hyper materials in an efficient and functional manner, but also had to align perfectly with Blackwing.

"I need to design and shape the module so that it is the most favorite possession target for Blackwing."

One of the reasons why Sharpie inhabited the Bloodsinger all of the time was because the greatsword truly served as an excellent abode for Ketis' companion spirit. The two matched so well with each other that it was as if they were an ideal match between body and soul.

Ves needed to recreate this effect on a larger and much more complicated scale. The Destructive Phasing Module would test his design skills, his research skills as well as his problem-solving skills.

"It is crazy for me to get all of this done in a matter of months."

Yet... Ves did not even consider the notion of planning for delays. He grew more and more excited about the prospect of successfully creating this advanced hyper module in record time!

"This is much more exciting than the Geist System!"

The Geist System was probably his first advanced hyper module, though it could barely be considered as such. Its creation was partially accidental, as Ves did not have the confidence that he could reproduce it again.

The Destructive Phasing Module would be different. Ves intended to conduct proper research and build up proper theories in order to develop it on a systematic basis.

The workload was much greater and more difficult, but the main advantage was that once he mastered this new method, the next time would be much easier than before!

"As long as I can independently design and make one advanced hyper module, I can do so again for all of my high-ranking mechs!"

Chapter 5965 Honorary Naval Engineer

Ves grew incredibly motivated now that he had fleshed out a more structural plan.

He knew much better now what he needed to do in order to complete his ambitious goal.

Figuring out a clearer roadmap and a more solid direction would help him avoid a lot of detours.

His next step to develop his first proper advanced hyper module was to do a lot of preparation work.

He urgently needed to catch up to the latest developments in the field of hyper technology. He allocated a bit of his time on cramming sessions where he devoured as much academic literature that he could find on the galactic net and the Red Association's internal database.

An important development at this time was that the Red Fleet finally completed the administrative paperwork that officially changed its relationship with Ves.

Normally, Ves would have nothing to do with the fleeters, but his involvement in the transformation of the Dominion of Man was too great for him to be a stranger anymore.

Rewarding him with a Battlecruiser Token was just the first step. The fleeters wanted to show their appreciation to him right away in order to improve his impression of the Red Fleet.

It took time to arrange for all of the other perks, but the time had finally come for Ves to gain access to the Red Fleet's internal network.

Captain Zonrad Reze left the Babylon Excavator and teleported directly down to Diandi Base in order to introduce Ves to his new benefits.

"The Red Fleet has awarded you with the title of 'honorary naval engineer'. It is analogous to the status of an associate of the Red Association, though it is more limited in scope. There are many implications to holding this new status, but the one that should hold the greatest interest for you is that you have received access to our internal database."

Ves immediately perked up when he heard that. He petted the gem cat on his lap even faster due to his elevated excitement.

"Meow~" Lucky yawned as he showed no interest in the conversation.

"What are my permission levels? What sort of information can I access?"

"You can access a large amount of relatively basic information, the sort that does not require you to pay CFA merits in order to access." Sigrund explained. "Much of the knowledge contained in our virtual library likely overlaps with the knowledge available from the Red Association. We still have our strong points. We employ many more researchers. Even if they are not as superhuman as high-ranking mech designers, they are much more numerous in quantity and systematic in their work."

That meant the Red Association likely developed stronger applications related to hyper technology while the Red Fleet built up a much stronger foundation in the basics of this field.

It just so happened that Ves needed to consult a lot of sources in the study of darkness. The Red Fleet was known to employ a lot of stealth-capable warships. The Seventh Light Fleet where Captain Reze used to hail from particularly liked to snoop around!

"Thank you." Ves smiled. "I do not feel my work has anything to do with proper naval engineering, but it doesn't matter so long as I can take a look at the entries related to phasewaster technology and hyper technology. I really need to improve my understanding in both fields if I want to complete a difficult project."

They began to talk about the other changes that resulted from the Red Fleet's treatment.

"There are many shipwrights and naval engineers within the Red Fleet that want to have an exchange with you. They have already conducted their first examinations of the Dominion of Man. Our entire organization has become abuzz when it is confirmed that you have turned what used to be one of our largest and most powerful warships into a masterwork. The performance along with the brand-new synergies with the Spark Reactor and so on are so unprecedented that it could clearly be regarded as a blasphemous result according to our original rules and regulations."

Ves curled his lips upwards. "Blasphemous she may be, but the current form of the Dominion of Man is too powerful for you fleeters to resist, isn't that correct?"

"You truly are a devil, Ves." The disguised AI shook his human head. "While our R&D personnel are continuing to decipher the changes that have overcome the Dominion of Mann, they can achieve much greater progress if you provide your feedback. They are requesting you to offer an explanation of what you have planned and what you have managed to accomplish from your own perspective. Are you willing to provide them with additional clarification?"

It did not surprise Ves that the fleeters desired his input. There were a lot of changes that were completely new and unfamiliar to the Red Fleet. Just the Carmine System and the Bloodfire Pact alone must have completely bedeviled the RF researchers!

"I am not so sure about this..."

"We will compensate you for your time. We are aware of how busy you are these days. We do not ask much from you. We merely want you to reserve a couple of hours of your time every day. We will teleport you to the Babylon Excavator where you can remotely conference with our scientists and engineers. We expect you to lecture us on the solutions that you have applied to our dreadnought and answer any questions that we might have."

Ves frowned deeper even as he scratched Lucky's metallic ears. "I am willing to share my information with you guys, but I cannot share all of my knowledge freely. The Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction have tied me to an agreement that prevents me from divulging certain proprietary trade secrets. You will need to approach them and negotiate an exemption if you want to understand the theory of what I have done to make your dreadnought alive."

Captain Reze did not look too surprised at that. "Discussions between the Red Fleet and the Red Association are still ongoing. Given that no progress on this issue has been made so far, I do not expect a quick result. It may be that the mechers will continue to deny cooperation on this matter."

If that was the case, then the mechers would probably become more cooperative once Ves was finally allowed to unveil the existence of the Carmine System and the first batch of commercial Carmine mech models.

That was still more than a year or so away. Until then, the Transhumanists absolutely did not want to leak too much information in advance.

"I can still talk about other stuff that is not related to the aforementioned proprietary trade secrets. It is not as much, but it should still be useful for your shipwrights and engineers."

"That would be for the best."

Ves and Sigrund quickly negotiated an informal deal on the knowledge exchange.

Ves did not want to waste too much time on this commitment, so he only promised to hold a handful of lectures related to his own interpretation of hyper technology and E-technology.

He also promised to answer questions related to specific aspects of the Dominion of Man's transformation so long as he did not have to share classified information.

As much as Ves wanted to improve his relations with the fleeters, he did not forget his original identity.

He always needed to prioritize the interests of the Red Association over the Red Fleet.

Perhaps it was acceptable for him to hedge his bets and try to form a closer balance between the two organizations, but it was absolutely not acceptable for him to defect to the Red Fleet entirely!

"In exchange for your cooperation on this matter, the Red Fleet agrees to raise your permission level." Sigrund said after they managed to hash out the details. "We will selectively open up our internal library to you. We will continue to deny you access to archival mission reports, the disposition of our warships, our full organizational chart, our most up to date warship and warship system designs, any information related to the Fire Elementals and other secrets that you have no business knowing about. The increase in permission level will only allow you to gain greater access to restricted repositories of scientific knowledge."

A much greater proportion of the Red Fleet's exclusive high technology became accessible to Ves!

This was exactly what he needed to increase the prep work for the development of the Destructive Phasing Module!

"That sounds acceptable. I have no interest in most of your secrets. I just want to understand the principles of some of your exclusive and advanced tech. I am especially interested in the hyper tech advancements made by your renowned research teams."

"This is the reward that you deserve."

The two finalized the details before Ves signed a new contract. He even shook hands with Sigrund at the end.

"You can go now." Ves made a motion of dismissal. "I need to study the reports and books your scientists have written about specific applications of hyper technology."

Sigrund looked amused. "Impatient, are we? Very well. I shall leave you alone. Do not forget to schedule your first lecture and Q&A session!"

Once the RF captain teleported back to his reconnaissance cruiser up in orbit, Ves immediately accessed the Red Fleet's virtual library again.

Just as promised, Ves gained access to a much larger selection of academic literature!

It was as if the Red Fleet had unlocked an entirely new wing in a library building just for himself!

Ves looked ecstatic to the point of hugging Lucky against his chest.

"Yes! There is lots of data and information about the Red Fleet's forays into developing hyper stealth systems!"

This was definitely among the more sensitive pieces of knowledge that the fleeters made available to Ves.

If he did not specifically insist on including knowledge on RF-developed stealth systems, he doubted that he would encounter anything related to them in the virtual library.

However, the fleeters weren't stupid enough to provide Ves with all of the information he needed to detect every RF stealth vessel.

The stealth section of the virtual library did not contain any component designs, or at least ones that were complete.

Many of the textbooks and articles written by the RF research personnel were also outdated by at least half a year.

The fleeters most definitely achieved greater progress by now, but Ves wouldn't learn about their advancements unless 6 months had passed.

This was a bit more annoying to Ves, but it was not too detrimental to him. He was already happy that he managed to gain access to the RF's data and theories on darkness and shadow-attributed hyper materials.

"This is really difficult to read!"

There were a lot of dense and complicated explanations. While Ves possessed just enough scientific acumen to interpret the content, it still took a lot of effort to digest all of this new knowledge in a short span of time.

It was worth it, though!

The fleeters spent big and allocated a lot of personnel on the projects related to darkness hypers. They managed to meet many of their goals, but also missed out on a lot due to limited understanding.

While Ves did not find any entries that were directly related to the working principles of the Destructive Phasing Module, he absorbed a lot of other knowledge related to darkness hyper materials in general.

This gave him much greater confidence that he would be able to identify and select the most powerful and suitable hyper materials for the Dark Zephyr.

"Now I need to find a way to bolster my E-technology credentials."

That was much harder. Neither the Red Association nor the Red Fleet had made too many attainments in this very elusive field. Even if they did manage to figure stuff out, they would definitely keep it out of the reach of most people!

"I need to consult a real expert on this matter..."

Chapter 5966 Self Development

"What is it, my child? I already informed you that I am preoccupied with important matters."

Veronica felt the powerful pressure of Cynthia's domain. It had grown stronger ever since she started to collaborate with the Evolution Witch. Her strengthening domain easily swept through the entire hull of the Throne of Light, the current flagship of the Oblivion Empire.

This change was not only a reflection of her recent gains, but also an indication that she no longer suppressed her power as much as before.

Cynthia directed a lot of attention to the ongoing preparations for a big operation. The fleet surrounding the Throne of Light had grown larger and more numerous. A lot of supplies were being shipped from unknown locations.

The high centralization of the Oblivion Empress meant that Cynthia directly controlled a lot of different institutions. Part of that was because she wanted to grasp as much power for herself, but another part of it was because many of her subordinates were not competent enough.

This was why Veronica could literally see a glowing cloud of activity surrounding the physical body of her mother. She was acting like a supercomputer that ran millions of different processes in parallel.

Veronica could believe that the mighty Oblivion Empress truly had little attention to spare to her child at the moment.

"I don't need too much of your time. I just want you to borrow your insights on the darkness element."

"No."

"No?"

The True God pinned the cyborg cat with a judgmental stare. "I refuse to share my knowledge of darkness with you. I am aware why you seek it, but I will not oblige you. You can repeat this request a thousand times, and you will receive a thousand no's. You shall not receive my teaching on this subject."

"Why... why are you so adamantly opposed?"

Cynthia narrowed her eyes as the cloud of thoughts around her darkened for a moment.

"My comprehension of darkness is unsuitable to you. No matter how much I control my speech, I cannot avoid the process of sharing my own understanding and interpretation of this element. The manuals and other texts in my possession that can teach you about darkness and many of its concepts all share the same problem. They are written by cultivators who are too depraved for the likes of you. It is best that you do not come into contact with any repository of knowledge on this subject."

"Then how am I supposed to make any progress?"

"Do what you have always done." Cynthia stated. "Conduct your own research. Make your own discoveries. True wisdom can never be given by others. It can only be cultivated through diligent and earnest work. You possess a remarkably untainted comprehension of the power of darkness. Do not soil it by absorbing the flawed and corrupted understanding of fools who constantly try to gain strength by relying on shortcuts."

Veronica was surprised by how vehemently her mother refused to teach him anything useful, but she had already taken this possible outcome into account. This was not the first time she refused to pass on her knowledge, though her reasoning this time was a lot stronger than usual.

"I see..." The cyborg cat sighed. "Can you at least give me a few general tips? Please give me direction."

"Hmmm." The True God briefly paused. "Darkness is not omnipotent. It is fickle and responds poorly to positive energy. If you imbue darkness into one of your expert mechs, then do not expect your work to perform consistently. Your machine will perform better when it is clouded in darkness, but the mech will also correspondingly perform weaker when subjected to strong light or positive energy."

That was a helpful reminder, particularly when activating Destructive Phasing endangered the lives of Tusa and the Dark Zephyr!

If their attempts to phase through an enemy target ended prematurely due to the phenomenon of attribute restraint, then a huge accident was bound to occur!

Veronica needed to remind Tusa and his battle partner to never activate this offensive ability unless they possessed a generous safety margin.

"Thank you for your tip. I did not sufficiently take this risk factor into account. Do you have any other tips?"

"Get. Out."

Veronica felt a firm hand taking hold of her feline body.

She soon got tossed through the hatch right when it slid shut!

Back in the Red Ocean, Ves briefly grew disappointed with what he managed to obtain.

His stingy mother refused to share her knowledge with him. She had a better reason to do this than usual, but it did not change the fact that she left him to struggle on his own for the umpteenth time.

"I shouldn't be blaming her." He softly told himself. "She is correct that I need to learn how to solve my own problems."

As a parent himself, he understood the desire to allow children to learn how to stand on their own feet.

The fact that Cynthia chose to let Ves figure stuff out on his own implied that she believed that he could succeed.

That was a good sign.

"Maybe she's right. Maybe this is something that I need to work on myself."

It would be more time consuming, but the insights he stood to gain from this would suit him the best.

Ves took his mother's hints seriously and sorted out his extensive knowledge base.

His current assumption was that he already possessed the knowledge and insights he needed to develop advanced hyper modules.

He just needed to identify them and combine them with each other to produce the desired result.

"What connection am I missing? How can I boost the power of my proposed Destructive Phasing Module?"

He paused for several minutes until he came up with a useful idea.

"Maybe I should take a closer look at my artifacts."

He pulled the Oceancaller and the Flower Parasol out of his System Space.

He hadn't made use of either of them after the transformation of the Dominion of Man. There weren't any situations where he needed to borrow their power, and he had become far too busy to care about their existence.

"I'm sorry for keeping you in that vault. I will practice with you as soon as my work session is over." Ves apologized to the Oceancaller.

The high-level artifact was alive and possessed its own feelings. Ves really shouldn't have treated the extraordinary flute in such a poor fashion.

He still intended to deepen his comprehension of the water element. The greater his understanding, the more extensively he could apply it to his mech designs.

However, working with the water element was not his highest priority at this time.

Darkness had become a lot more relevant to Ves now. He needed to become proficient in its use as soon as possible, or else he would be wasting the reward he earned from the lightning tribulation.

"As for you, I probably won't keep you. There are others who need your protection more than I do. You are a poor fit for a phase lord."

The Flower Parasol lacked the ability to resize itself like the Oceancaller. That made it a lot less practical to Ves during the moments where he desired its protection the most.

Since it was only designed to be held in human hands, then so be it. Ves never really asked for it anyway. It was the fault of the Wishing Fountain that he received this embarrassingly pink parasol.

"I will gift you to one of my girls during their next birthday. I just have to pick the right recipient and time."

The parasol was not small or light. His children may be stronger due to their partial primordial human physique, but that did not mean they could comfortably hold a parasol sized for female adults!

Ves quickly recalled the reason why he pulled them out of the Vault of Eternity. Since time was of the essence, he quickly went serious and examined his artifacts with a critical eye.

His recent growth and sublimation allowed him to glean even more details than before. He faintly managed to touch the secret that enabled his Oceancaller to dynamically grow or shrink in size.

The Flower Parasol intricately made use of the wood element to power its demanding defensive functions.

However, there was a clear reason why the parasol was themed around flowers in particular. He deduced that it may possess a hidden function that was related to flowers.

He failed to find out what that may be. Ves possessed no particular affinity for flowers, so the ones printed on the canopy told him nothing.

The Flower Parasol never really approved of him. It merely tolerated him. The high-level artifact already made it clear that it preferred to be held by a lady.

"You will get your wish, but not now. It has to be the right time."

Hopefully, whoever received the Flower Parasol might be able to convince it to unveil its secret function.

Ves continued to study his System-issued artifacts. Their defective nature made it harder for him to appreciate their charm. He felt that he was missing a huge part of the original intentions of their makers. This hindered his ability to understand the artifacts.

His examinations were not fruitless, though. As Ves spent an entire hour examining the artifacts from top to bottom, he managed to form a couple of connections and obtained a few useful insights.

"I see..."

Ves placed the Oceancaller to his lips and began to play a short tune. Floating blue runes started to appear around the length of the instrument.

Though Ves did not possess a thorough understanding of runes, he knew that they played a large part in turning the Oceancaller from a simple flute made out of extraordinary materials to a high-level artifact!

"Runes."

Anything became more powerful once runes became involved. Ves believed that he could make his Destructive Phasing Module powerful enough to be of use to the Dark Zephyr if he augmented it with runes.

"I am not strong enough." Ves grimaced.

Senior Mech Designers still fell under the first major cultivation rank. He needed to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer in order to become qualified to work with runes.

The acquisition of a proper domain allowed a domain shaper to make contact with a deeper layer of reality.

Ves speculated that this layer happened to involve runes.

Unless Ves could replicate this effect through alternate means, it was not his turn to play around with runes this time.

"Yet is it true that I cannot do anything with runes at this time?"

Now that he thought about it, he had been working with runes for multiple years!

His Ascension Runes were still a form of runes!

The key difference was how they came into existence.

Ancient creation cultivators manually applied runes to the original versions of the Oceancaller and the Flower Parasol.

Ves applied his Ascension Runes by setting up his third order living mechs for growth.

They just happened to form their Ascension Runes without requiring Ves to do any of the work!

This realization granted him a powerful inspiration!

"Can I apply this novel means of forming runes in other situations? What if I use a similar approach to slap a bunch of runes onto my upcoming Destructive Phasing Module?"

Ves was much more confident that this would work!

He did not even need to understand the individual meaning of every rune. He just had to set up the right growth process to avoid the module from becoming corrupted.

Though the idea of forming runes through growth made a lot of sense to Ves, it was much harder to form them on a machine other than a third order living mech.

"Unless... the Destructive Phasing Module can borrow the special qualities of the Dark Zephyr to promote its growth."

It would be like growing a new organ inside a body!

Ves believed this idea had promise. The downside was that the Destructive Phasing Module wouldn't be functional right away, but as long as it had enough time to grow, it should eventually be ready for use!

#### Chapter 5967 Sixth Generation Living Mechs

"What are runes?"

Ves asked this question many times over the past few hours.

He plunged the depths of his knowledge base and tried to form a coherent answer that made sense.

He also accessed the books and tomes, both real and virtual, for any solid theories and references.

It did not surprise him that the RA and RF's internal databases contained references to runes.

However, any mention of them was scant and shallow. The scientific community was aware of them to an extent, but the prevailing rule that only domain shapers were qualified to work with them heavily limited people's ability to apply runes on a wide scale.

Given how the mention of runes was so conspicuously absent among the academic literature he had access to, he began to suspect that the Red Association secretly maintained a high-level virtual library that could only be accessed by Master Mech Designers and Star Designers.

It made sense to restrict their knowledge and spread to lesser professionals. There was no point in getting distracted by them. Learning about the existence of runes may even distort their progression and end up harming their career prospects.

"To be honest, I have become one of them. Even now, I am thinking about inducing the development of Ascension Runes in my Destructive Phasing Module."

He couldn't get rid of the idea. It sounded incredibly promising. If he was able to master the development of a true rune-supported advanced hyper module, the Dark Zephyr would readily exceed his previous best works.

The Phobos would look like an amateur in front of the Dark Zephyr!

This was such an enormous leap in combat power that Ves believed it could radically redefine his high-end mechs just as much as Gloriana's archetech!

His passion burned hotter and brighter when he began to envision all sorts of mechs that borrowed the power of Ascension Runes to accomplish feats that defied reality to such a massive extent that they could be regarded as miracles!

He believed he had accidentally stumbled upon an idea so powerful, that it could firmly separate every living mech that possessed it from older machines that lacked this feature.

Ves quickly activated a projection and began to write down his thoughts and speculations.

Driven by the inspiration in his mind, he rapidly fleshed out his theories and began to form a tentative new theoretical framework that formed the basis of his powerful idea.

"Ascension Runes are runes that are naturally formed inside sufficiently powerful living mechs. That is because they conform to the rules of high-level artifacts as well as living entities. In most cases, artifacts can become comprehensively more powerful if a qualified artisan adds more runes to their makeup. Ascension Runes turn this order around. Due to their powerful growth potential, third order living mechs can gradually form them based on many different factors, causing them to grow powerful in a targeted fashion."

The most important fact in all of this was that Ascension Runes did not require the participation of a domain shaper creation cultivator in order to add to a living mech.

It was the living mech that did most of the work!

The selection and formation of the Ascension Runes took place naturally over time. Depending on the preferences of the mech pilot, the guidance from a design spirit and the influence of external stimuli, third order living mechs possessed the ability to grow in a similar fashion to mutated beasts or maybe even calamity beasts!

"Now that I think about it, third order living mechs are akin to mechanical versions of mutated beasts that just happen to be pilotable!"

The comparison between third order living mechs and beasts strengthened his belief that this was a viable research direction.

"Ascension Runes are already an existing phenomenon. Any third order living mech can grow them. I am not sure how many of them a mech can develop, but it has to be at least as much as the runes on the Oceancaller."

Would a third order living mech with the same quantity of runes as the Oceancaller become just as powerful?

Not necessarily. It was not just the quantity of runes that mattered, but how well they synergized with each other.

The runes were akin to a programming language. A software program could be weak or strong depending on how well the coder strung programming commands together.

Therefore, a well-designed artifact that made the most out of 40 runes could theoretically defeat a poorly-designed artifact that utilized 400 runes.

"The problem with Ascension Runes is that their growth and formation is organic rather than directed. It is easy for each individual Ascension Rune to add a lot of individual power, but it is not quite clear whether they can be combined together to produce a transformative combination effect."

This was still a bit unclear to Ves. Third order living mechs did not exist long enough to form a large amount of Ascension Runes. Without being able to study a truly old third order living mech, Ves lacked the empirical data needed to prove his theory.

"Wait! That is not entirely correct. There is at least one living mech that is a lot older..."

He immediately thought of the Ouroboros. Last he managed to get into contact with Axelar Streon's famous ace mech, Ves had just applied a long-awaited upgrade that fixed many of its congenital deficiencies.

"By now, it should have evolved into a third order living mech, and a powerful one at that!"

The Ouroboros in its current incarnation was like an uncaged beast. It was no longer held back by its deficiencies anymore!

Even if the Ouroboros was not yet able to transcend into a god mech due to other major reasons, that did not change the fact that it had probably accrued a huge amount of Ascension Runes!

"Back when I upgraded it, I already completed the development of fifth generation living mechs."

Ascension Runes was the defining characteristic of the fourth generation of living mechs, which meant that the current version of the Ouroboros was probably filled with Ascension Runes!

"I need to take a good look at this machine!"

The problem was that General Axelar Streon and the Streon Ancient Clan were preoccupied with the preparations for the proposed grand heist.

Ves would have to leave New Constantinople VIII and travel to the territory owned by the Streons in order to get a good look at the Ouroboros.

"It's not necessary." He shook his head. "I can figure this out myself."

He was confident he could harvest a lot of insights if he was allowed to examine the current iteration of the Ouroboros up close, but he resisted the urge to schedule a reunion.

There were many unknowns and uncertainties surrounding Ascension Runes. Just because he was able to induce his third order living mechs into forming them did not mean he understood their working principles.

He just made an accidental discovery and just ran with it. Ves became akin to a hacker that barely learned how to exploit an aspect of reality.

While it was better for him in the long run if he studied the rules and deconstructed all of the working principles, this was not possible. Ves strongly believed he needed to become a Master Mech Designer before he could embark on this high-level research activity.

For now, he should continue to stick with what was working and expand on that. Ves was hardly the first engineer or mech designer who willingly harnessed powers that he could not fully control.

As Ves continued to flesh out his theoretical model for advanced hyper modules, he tried his best to figure out a solution for the application of Ascension Runes.

He frowned and rubbed his hairless chin in thought.

"Advanced hyper modules cannot reach their full potential unless they are augmented by a set of runes. Third order living mechs already possess them, but their Ascension Runes correspond to their mech frames as a whole. I can't just transplant them or copy them to the advanced hyper module. That doesn't make much sense. Even if Ascension Runes possess a remarkably capacity of adapting to different objects, that still does not address the fact that they are far from optimized in enhancing the power of a new module."

If Ascension Runes was akin to the programming code of a mech, then it was obvious that it could not be applied to a piece of mech equipment such as a laser rifle, a power reactor or a flight system.

Attempting to do so would just cause all of the parts and gear to crash and become inoperable!

Ves had a hunch that the rules were much looser when it came to E-technology, but there was a limit to how much Ascension Runes could be stretched.

This was a problem because the advanced hyper module needed to derive its power from its own exclusive set of Ascension Runes.

If it had to 'share' power with the Ascension Runes of a third order living mech as a whole, then that would severely discount the power of the advanced hyper module.

"How can I induce a third order living mech to produce a second set of Ascension Runes for its advanced hyper module?"

It took a few minutes before Ves became struck by another bout of inspiration.

"Mrow~"

Blinky emerged from Ves' head and floated in the air. The fluffy purple spiritual cat swished his tail in both interest and curiosity.

"This... this might actually work..."

To be honest, he came up with this idea a few times in the past, but he always pushed it aside because it sounded like a solution without a problem.

What was different was that Ves just happened to struggle with the problem in question at this time!

In other words, the solution that had long waited to be used finally became relevant!

Ves quickly began to adjust his theoretical model to incorporate his latest brainchild.

The model became more complete. Everything fit together. Every logical relationship built on top of each other with no obvious incongruities.

It was... perfect in a way that resonated with his design flame.

He knew that as long as he managed to prove the validity of this innovative theoretical model, he would complete the initial development of his sixth generation living mechs!

"Sixth generation! This is too soon!"

It had only been a short time ago that he came up with the fifth generation of living mechs. The Age of Dawn introduced red humanity to exotic radiation, which made cultivation a lot more accessible to every life form.

Ves easily managed to develop fifth generation living mechs based on a simple premise. Since his products were alive, they should also be able to cultivate by themselves.

"My sixth generation living mechs take this comparison a step further. Since people can acquire companion spirits, living mechs should be able to acquire their own companion spirits as well!"

It was a simple yet incredibly subversive idea!

He had already applied it to living fey in the past, but this was different. Instead of using companion spirits to empower an external module, Ves wanted to do so with an internal module, one that directly strengthened the mech itself!

Many people were still struggling to wrap their heads around the fact that they could obtain their own companion spirits as long as they ingested the right fruit. The notion of tying them to living mechs was even less easy to accept by the general population. Few people understood how the Fey Fianna model actually worked after all of this time. Ves briefly frowned. "Companion spirits is a clunky name. I need to change that into a different one in order to distinguish them from the normal ones."

In any case, the existence of mech-based companion spirits had the potential to solve one of the greatest problems in the development of advanced hyper modules.

So long as these new subordinate entities could bond with advanced hyper modules and gradually form their own set of Ascension Runes based on their specific situations, then that would allow mechs such as the Dark Zephyr to continually strengthen their hyper abilities!

"Now that I think about it, this setup sounds similar to characters in a virtual reality game. A third order living mech can essentially level up by forming more Ascension Runes that act as 'experience points'. The same mech can also increase the power of its advanced hyper module as if it is an ultimate ability by adding 'skill points'!"

Ascension Runes acted as both experience points and skill points in this very simplistic example. The Ascension Runes were just being applied to different subjects.

"Maybe I should come up with a new name for the Ascension Runes developed by the companion spirit of a living mech."

Ves continued to expand and refine his theoretical framework in order to form a complete theoretical base for his advanced hyper modules. He needed to come up with a whole net set of definitions in order to clarify a lot of stuff.

## Chapter 5968 Ultimate Invention

After several hours of theorizing and puzzling, Ves finally completed his latest theoretical framework.

It lacked empirical support, but that did not stop Ves from appreciating it for its amazing potential.

He also thought a lot on how to label every new concept and variable. Using the term 'Ascension Runes' to describe the ones applied to the advanced hyper module could easily lead to confusion and misinterpretations.

Aside from that, the term 'advanced hyper module' no longer fit his latest project anymore. It had gone far beyond the scope of a conventional application of hyper technology.

If he wanted to do his invention justice and make it clearer to his customer base that this feature was powerful beyond comparison, then he needed to match it with an appropriately grand-sounding name!

By the end of the work session, Ves visited his wife's design lab and presented her with his recent progress.

Gloriana raised her eyebrows as she took in her husband's fantastical ideas.

Hekkel was not present at this time, so she did not bother to wear her Archglove at the moment.

Instead, she kept her hands busy by scratching and caressing the intricate archemetal exterior of a certain pampered gem cat.

"Meow~..."

Gloriana continued to utilize her processing power to go over the implications of Ves' latest design application. She quickly recognized how it could dramatically boost the combat power of every high-end Larkinson mech, but only if it actually worked.

"I will not comment on the viability of this idea of yours. I trust you enough that you will not present this to me if you are not confident in your own work." She spoke up. "I agree with you that if your advanced hyper modules have so much promise, then it has earned the right to carry its own name. You have already proven with your Fey Fiannas that mechs can become more powerful by forming their own versions of companion spirits. I have a question, though."

"Ask away."

"Do you really have to call them 'Ultimate Modules', complete with capitalization?"

Ves grinned. "I do. It sounds awesome, doesn't it? I do not use the word 'Ultimate' lightly. I truly think that the power of my proposed invention will live up to this word. Even if it isn't obvious at first, just give it a few years. As long as it can grow and accumulate enough Ultimate Runes, it will one day grow powerful enough to defeat mechs an entire tier higher! Standard mechs can defeat expert mechs! Expert mechs can defeat ace mechs!"

That was an incredibly bold statement!

Though Ves had made this claim before in relation to other design applications, he firmly believed that this was the most effective implementation to date!

Gloriana scratched Lucky's chin and tried to determine whether Ves was right.

"Can Ultimate Modules truly elevate the power of living mechs to this extent?"

"They can. The key is E energy radiation." Ves emphasized. "A stronger spiritual foundation is not a curiosity anymore. Starting from the Age of Dawn, a stronger spirit can directly influence the power of heaven. Do you realize the significance of this, Gloriana? This is probably the most concrete and physical manifestation of the benefits of growth! Previously, a living mech that experienced growth isn't obviously stronger than ones that are still young and fresh. The guidance, piloting experience and certain spiritual abilities have all become stronger, but the performance parameters of the machine have not really changed all that much. The addition of Ultimate Modules changes that. Older mechs can readily crush younger mechs by properly utilizing their stronger spiritual foundations!"

"No wonder you think that this is good enough to form the basis of your sixth generation living mechs." Gloriana recognized the significance of his invention. "One of the shortcomings of your design philosophy is that it is very hard to affect a mech's material performance. It is well-established by now that the vast majority of benefits brought by your living meals are intangible and impossible to measure. Ultimate Modules invalidate this assumption. There will be even fewer reasons for customers to prefer products designed by other competitors. How difficult will it be for other mech designers to match or exceed your Ultimate Modules?"

"It's not impossible, but it will be difficult. No ordinary mech designer can rival my work." Ves stated. "My living mechs have accrued too many advantages over the years. Each generation of living mech adds a useful new feature. When multiple of them are in a single machine, they start to add up and synergize with each other. Ultimate Modules do not exist in isolation, but are supported by other useful features such as third order living mechs and active mech cultivation."

Ves acknowledged that it was theoretically possible to come up with a hyper system that enabled mechs to manipulate E energy on a wider scale, but such machines should not be cheap or easy.

As Gloriana went over the documents shared by her husband, her expression shifted multiple times as she read his theories and assumptions.

Ultimate Modules were different because they combined hyper technology as well as E-technology to produce an affordable combination that could deliver exceptionally strong results!

As Gloriana went over the documents shared by her husband, her expression shifted multiple times as she read his theories and assumptions.

She began to pick apart certain details about Ves' latest theoretical framework.

"The notion of creating companion spirits for your living mechs to empower your Ultimate Modules is a brilliant idea. Why have you opted to label them as 'Ultimate Seeds'?"

"I needed to distinguish them from the companion spirits that we are familiar with. The reason why I call them seeds is that they will all start out weak to the point where the Ultimate Modules of my living mechs won't display much power at first. The mech pilot of the living mech must put effort into nurturing the seed before it can begin to show its power. Each Ultimate Seed will grow more powerful when they accumulate more Ultimate Runes."

It did not take any explanation for Gloriana to understand that Ultimate Runes were simply Ascension Runes that Ves renamed for his Ultimate Modules.

The runes still worked the same, but they acted on different aspects of a living mech.

"If my guess is correct, an Ultimate Module will only function properly when one of your products has evolved into a third order living mech. That means that there is a time interval where the module is a burden to the machine in question."

"That is true, but it doesn't take too much time for a second order living mech to reach full sapience. According to the data collected by the LMC, it can take 6 to 12 months for a typical living mech to reach the third order."

Ves was not too worried about this. Weak performance at the start of a mech's life cycle was a well-known issue with living mechs. Most customers who appreciated them already knew that they

needed to give these living machines enough time to mature before subjecting them to serious battles.

His wife pointed out another issue.

"If Ultimate Runes function as a programming language, then it does not make sense that they can incrementally increase the effectiveness of an Ultimate Module. The destructive phasing module that you proposed not too long ago is based on a sequence of complicated operations. How can the Dark Zephyr engage in destructive phasing when his Ultimate Module only has a handful of runes?"

"Runes work differently than you think." Ves retorted. "Even a single one can carry a full and complex meaning. It's difficult to explain, but trust me that the Dark Zephyr with a functional Ultimate Module can already pull off destructive phasing without needing to collect a lot of Ultimate Runes. It will start out relatively weak at first, but the advantage of my work is that it can always grow and exceed its original limitations."

"Yet can a growth process that is completely happening outside of anyone's direct control truly enable an Ultimate Module to improve its capabilities in an effective manner?" Gloriana pressed.

"I believe that intent, desire and other strong thoughts and emotions will cause the right Ultimate Runes to form." Ves confidently replied. "I have made sure to modify the implementation of Ultimate Runes in order to facilitate this process. This is one of the many areas that set them apart from Ascension Runes."

In general, third order living mechs were able to select their own Ascension Runes that represented different kinds of enhancements. They usually made their selections by listening to individual preferences of their mech pilots.

The growth of Ultimate Runes needed to happen without any direct intervention from mech pilots. Only indirect influence was necessary to ensure that a living mech's Ultimate Module evolved in a direction that best suited the circumstances.

"If this is the case, then many Ultimate Modules will diverge in performance over time." Gloriana remarked. "This will make your living mechs less consistent with each other. Maybe one ranged mech is able to leverage its Ultimate Module to fire an energy beam that can bypass transphasic energy shields. Another ranged mech can use the same initial version of the Ultimate Module to fire an energy beam that splits into three beams. The same hardware produces radically different results."

Ves smirked and crossed his arms. "I don't see a problem with that. Every mech pilot is different. Every living mech is also different. Consistency is not important as power in this new era. I do not mind sacrificing uniformity if my products end up winning more battles as a result of my work."

His wife was not comfortable with this idea, but she knew it made sense.

The two continued to discuss the theory behind Ultimate Modules.

The existence of Ultimate Runes confused Gloriana for a time, but Ves did a decent job at explaining his underlying theories and assumptions on how they were meant to be used.

"I have another question, Ves. Let us consider a scenario where a mature third order living mech has fought against a powerful enemy and returned to its mothership with heavy damage. One of the

more serious blows is the complete destruction of its Ultimate Module. How feasible is it to restore its functionality on the damaged machine?"

That was indeed a tricky scenario. Fortunately, Ves already thought about this possible outcome.

"It will be similar to the replacement of fey." Ves replied. "The physical fey are expendable because their destruction or removal will not affect the state of the subordinate spirit. The Ultimate Seed will temporarily lose its home and will have to stay in another part of the mech for a time. Once the living mech is restored, the previously homeless Ultimate Seed should easily be able to inhabit the newly installed Ultimate Module."

That was a convenient setup. It also ensured that the growth of the Ultimate Seed did not get lost with the destruction of its hardware counterpart.

There was one more important question on Gloriana's mind.

"Each Ultimate Module design is different. They all demand different combinations of Ultimate Runes based on different elements and concepts in order to fit the function of the module in question. Is it possible to replace one type of Ultimate Module with another type of Ultimate Module and retain full functionality? For example, let us consider the Dark Zephyr Mark III. It originally carries the destructive phasing module, but later on gets replaced by a 'super invisibility module'. Will the latter perform to the same level as the former, or will there be a loss in effectiveness?"

That was a scenario that Ves did not consider as much. He frowned in thought.

"It depends on the adaptability and versatility of runes itself, but... the greater the differences in Ultimate Modules, the lower the effectiveness of the newer module. Some runes won't fit anymore while others operate at reduced effectiveness. I think that this outcome should be avoided as much as possible. Once a living mech has gained an Ultimate Module, it should stick to the same type. At most, we can design updated versions of the hardware that still retain the same functionality but simply offer superior performance."

"I see. You should test that, Ves."

"It is already on the list."

Chapter 5969 Malleable Legacy Products

Talking to Gloriana had been fruitful for Ves.

He not only made his wife aware of the amazing potential of his Ultimate Module, but also allowed her to plan for its addition to the Dark Zephyr Mark III in advance.

Furthermore, his wife also asked a lot of good questions that allowed Ves to flesh out aspects that he had not properly considered.

His theoretical framework became more solid and complete as a result. He gained even greater confidence that his latest idea would comprehensively elevate the combat power of the Dark Zephyr Mark III and more.

Since Ves had dabbled into multi-spirit living mechs yet again, he also went back and expanded one of his older theoretical frameworks.

The Fey Fianna was the first asymmetrical multi-spirit living mech.

It was multi-spirit because it contained multiple personalities.

It was asymmetrical because its subordinate spirits were not equal to the dominant spirit.

Now, Ves added another classification to distinguish his living mechs further.

According to his expanded theory, the Fey Fianna should now be classified as an external asymmetrical multi-spirit living mech.

The word 'external' signified that the Fey Fianna's subordinate spirits acted on separate constructs. The living fey were unable to augment the combat power of the base mech directly.

In contrast, the Dark Zephyr Mark III according to the latest plan should be classified as an internal asymmetrical multi-spirit living mech.

It gained a special subordinate spirit called an Ultimate Seed that exclusively occupies a physical Ultimate Module.

In most cases, the Ultimate Seed needs to work together with the Ultimate Module in order to activate a powerful Ultimate Ability.

The destructive phasing ability that Ves had come up with for the Dark Zephyr Mark III qualifies as one!

"Since it is possible to develop an internal or external asymmetrical multi-spirit living mech, is it possible to design a machine that combines both of them at once?"

In other words, could the Fey Fianna or any similar mech accommodate an Ultimate Module as well?

"There is nothing that stops this from happening!"

The only issue was that the spiritual foundation of a mech bore a greater burden by maintaining so many subordinate spirits. There was always a price to pay, but it should not be too big in this case.

"The next update of the Fey Fianna model should include an Ultimate Module as well!"

Ves decided to call this possible implementation a combination multi-spirit living mech.

"It will probably take a lot of time before I am ready to design such a mech, but once I do, I'll be able to verify even more theories."

He was getting ahead of himself. He had yet to design and build a mech with a functional Ultimate Module at this time. He needed to accomplish this first before he could think about designing more advanced mechs.

His focus for the following years should center around the development of future internal asymmetrical multi-spirit living mechs. They held great promise and should have lots of room for refinement.

"I should have realized it sooner. It is such an obvious idea."

He never fully recognized until now that the subordinate spirits of living mechs could develop their own form of Ascension Runes!

Fortunately, it was not too late.

Once he woke up and came up with his latest concept, Ves had essentially developed a brand new core system that made his living mechs more complete!

Ves grew a lot more passionate about the Dark Zephyr Mark III Project. This was the first mech that would carry a proper Ultimate Module, and Ves became excited beyond belief!

His productivity rose at a remarkable rate. He began to make rapid progress in his research.

One of the more exciting moments was when the Red Association finally delivered a diverse batch of medium to high grade hyper materials.

It was quite convenient to rely on the Red Association's service on this matter. The mechers possessed an even greater collection of hyper materials than the Terrans. The former were also a lot more willing to give him access to the more restricted and confidential samples.

Of course, Ves still needed to pay for what they were worth, and that was not small in many cases.

Ves did not mind because he had plenty of MTA merits to spare.

When he visited the underground storeroom that held the recently delivered samples, he did not come alone.

He decided to bring Andraste along.

Yaika's death affinity caused the girl to become more sensitive towards death and negative energy.

Combined with the senses granted by her partial primordial human physique, she was able to perceive a lot more out of hyper materials than most people!

He currently held her in his arms. The girl looked curious at the cold, industrial surroundings. She never visited this section of Diandi Base before and grew curious at all of the mechs, materials and supplies stored inside all of the storage spaces.

"So much stuff." The girl said with awe.

"That's right. It is better to have too much than too little. I have everything I need to fabricate or materialize first-class mechs. We can not only produce powerful mechs of our own design, but we can also produce a select range of mechs designed by other companies. We don't have enough pilots to make use of them all. We are still in the process of ramping up recruitment."

"Ohhh..."

Also accompanying Ves was Alexa Streon.

The former Terran mech designer had been busy in the past few months. She completed her pilgrimage to the Red Association. Though she did not really learn a lot of new secrets, she still returned as a changed woman.

After she came back, she began to flesh out the basic structure of her design philosophy and began to explore what she was capable of by designing a few casual mechs.

"I would have thought that you would start a more serious project by now." Ves said as he passed through the entrance that led into the material storeroom. "The sooner you start to produce your living legacy mechs, the sooner they can start their own mech dynasties. Isn't that the whole point of your design philosophy?"

The blond woman shook her head as she walked alongside her mentor. "Time is of the essence, but I cannot afford to botch the introduction of my living legacy mechs by publishing objectively inferior products. My preferred target audience comprises old and well-established family organizations. They already have their own channels for mechs, so it is an uphill battle to persuade them to invest in my legacy mechs. I need to present them with a product that they are already inclined to purchase without factoring the inheritance aspects."

Ves frowned at that. "You won't be able to sell any of your products to them if you design them by yourself. The only way to present an attractive value proposition is if you collaborate with other mech designers, or make your products malleable enough that the mech designers working for the family organizations can further refine and adapt your legacy mechs. Have you chosen your strategy?"

"I have, sir. From the two possibilities that you have presented, I strongly favor the latter." She said. "Do not get me wrong. If I collaborate with you, I am convinced that the resulting end product will be more than strong enough in its own right. My issue with that is that I will become too dependent on the contributions of other mech designers. That is not how I want to develop my design philosophy. This is why I have adopted a strategy and a business model that should make my products attractive to my target audience without requiring any help from you or other mech designers."

It was a bold approach, but also a risky one.

"So your plan is to design a basic legacy mech that can be used as a starting point for further customization?"

Alexa nodded. "I have grown up studying and working with the mechs of the Streon Ancient Clan. I understand how management handles third-party mechs. It is unlikely for such demanding clients to easily embrace mechs produced by another company. The Streons have their own mech doctrines, martial traditions, technological standards and more. If they want to add a third-party mech model to their roster, then the product must be malleable enough to allow their own mech designers to reshape it into a Streon mech."

"I see. If this is already an established phenomenon in this side of the mech industry, then I could see how it makes sense for you. It is much easier to design a variant of a mech if it is only empowered by a single design philosophy as opposed to 5 of them. As long as the intrinsic qualities of your design philosophy remain intact, there are legitimate reasons for your target audience to embrace your works!"

There were clear downsides to approach, but so long as Alexa was able to persuade enough large clients to invest in her legacy mechs, they would soon be able to cultivate a lot of mech dynasties in a few generations!

"I don't think you'll be able to attract the appreciation of any first-class customers." Ves said. "You are still too young and you haven't built up much of a reputation in the business. You may be able to borrow my reputation to persuade more open-minded second-class customers to trial your legacy mechs, but their enthusiasm shouldn't be too strong at first. It takes far too much time for your products to show their true value."

"Although I prefer to design first-class mechs, I am not opposed to designing second-class or even third-class mechs." Alexa said with a smile. "You have started your career by designing the most

basic third-class mechs. I am of the belief that I should expand my horizons and familiarize myself with third-class mech design. Once I have earned enough success in the third-class mech market, I may move on to designing second-class legacy mechs."

That... was a pretty deep plan.

"I can see the logic in your approach, but... it will take a long time before you can design proper first-class mechs if that is the case." Ves said. "Are you sure you want to commit to such a long journey?"

"I do, sir. Do not worry. I am still available for collaborations on first-class mechs. I can still pull my own weight in the Design Department and complete any assignments. I will only design third-class mechs in my free time."

That sounded acceptable to Ves. Personally, he would have chosen a different approach, but he admired Alexa for her willingness to work outside of her comfort zone. Her attitude and behavior were much more conducive to subsequent promotions.

"We're here." Ves said.

The group stopped before a long table that held a large amount of secure metal containers.

The alloys used to make the head-sized containers did a good job at isolating the fluctuations of the hyper materials stored inside.

Ves developed a greater interest in the containers themselves. The alloys reminded him of B-stone.

"Interesting. I need to get more of this material."

His daughter squirmed in his arms. "Papa! Go over there! Yaika senses something good in that box!"

She became so attracted by the unknown material stored in that specific container that a black spiritual kitten shot out of her forehead.

"Maaw!"

It looked like Yaika couldn't wait to come into contact with the mysterious hyper material!

"MROW!"

"MaaAAAW?!"

Before Yaika could reach her destination, Blinky appeared and quickly bit her scruff, thereby stopping the naughty kitten in her tracks!

"Maaaaaw! Maaaaaw!"

"Mrow mrow mrow!"

"Papa! Why did you stop my companion spirit? Yaika merely wanted to take a closer look."

"It's not safe, dear. Some of these hyper materials are so energetic or weird that they can inflict real harm on people. I need to examine them from a distance before I ever think about letting you get close."

"Awww... that's so boring, papa."

## Chapter 5970 What Are Hypers?

"Maaaw... maaaw... maaaw..."

"Mrow! Mrow!"

A black kitten continued to dangle from the mouth of the larger purple cat.

As overeager as she may be, What Yaika had done could have been incredibly dangerous for the juvenile companion spirit!

"Don't do that again." Ves admonished his daughter as he set her body to the ground while staring at her in the face. "Not all hyper materials are harmless. The samples I bought from the Red Association are rare and expensive for multiple reasons. A few of them are so dangerous that they can poison people just by proximity. The main reason why you can't sense their threat is because their activity is being suppressed by the special alloys used to make these boxes."

That reminded him that he needed to look into the containers. He had many uses for a material that possessed similar properties to the B-stone that he obtained a long time ago, especially one that was powerful enough to resist first-class weapon attacks.

"Okay. I will not go closer. I will be more careful, papa."

Andraste may be impulsive, but she wasn't stupid. Yaika just lost control due to getting attracted by something that smelled really enticing for whatever reason.

Whatever the mechers stuffed in that box had to be special in order to provoke such a reaction!

Ves was glad that he could teach his girl this lesson. If not, she might end up falling into a trap if she faced a similar situation in the future!

"Maaaaw!"

Blinky let go of Yaika's scruff now that the smaller kitten had regained control over herself.

Yaika then began to whine as Blinky decided that this was a great time to give his 'child' a bath!

"Maaaw! Maaaaw!"

"Mrow mrow mrow~"

In the meantime, Ves held Andraste's hand as he moved over to an elevated ramp that provided a clear view of the long table and the containers holding all of the samples.

Although not all of the hyper materials posed a threat to humans, it was better to be safe than sorry. Maintaining a healthy distance from high-grade hyper materials was a mandatory safety precaution.

Alexa Streon moved up the ramp as well.

Maia had emerged out of her head and observed the containers with rapt attention. As a companion spirit aspected towards the more nurturing side of life, the ragdoll cat was biased towards positive energy. She did not like the vibe of the suppressed samples. They felt far too ominous and hostile.

"Myah..."

Alexa spent a brief amount of time checking whether all of the safety precautions were in order.

"We can proceed at your instruction, sir."

"Open the first container."

"Inputting command."

The first container at the far left unlocked and began to slide open. A plain black metal bar began to float a small distance into the air, allowing the observers a clear view of the somewhat distant object.

Fortunately, Ves, his daughter and Alexa all possessed strong and augmented senses, so they had no problem with examining the metal alloy from this distance.

"Do you know what hyper materials are, pumpkin?"

Andraste leaned against her father's leg and furrowed her brows.

"My teachers and the textbooks barely mention anything about hypers. They are so new that people are still trying to figure everything out. One of the theories that is popular is that a special kind of material exists that resonates with different elemental E-energies. As long as there is a connection, that material begins to absorb E energy and gets changed by it to become more compatible with that element."

Ves smiled. "That is an interesting theory. What is your opinion, Alexa?"

As a proper Journeyman Mech Designer, Alexa had come into contact with much more extensive theories related to hyper technology.

"The theory mentioned by your daughter is unsubstantiated." The former Terran responded. "The truth is that we have not pinned down the true reason why hyper materials come into existence. A common hypothesis is that hypers are similar to exotics in that they are remnants of old and powerful organisms. Another hypothesis that is gaining traction is that materials that turn into hypers possess a common property that is not observable in realspace. It may be a trait that is hidden in another dimension. However, it is important to note that no one has yet to provide definitive proof for these assertions. It is best not to make any assumptions and work with hypers with the attitude of remaining cautious and keeping an open mind. Just because we have yet to detect any danger does not mean it is nonexistent. We must always maintain our awe towards unfamiliar phenomena."

Ves nodded in approval while Andraste did not really look that interested.

"I'm not a scientist, papa. I have no interest in learning science."

Ves tapped his daughter's adorable head. "Knowledge is power, my dear. Your learning ability is superior to many other people in the new frontier and the old galaxy. It would be an enormous waste for you to squander your superior conditions. Do you know how much I envied first-raters back when I was a kid? While it is true that you do not need to know how reality works in detail in order to be a good soldier, there are times where knowing how stuff works can save your lives. Besides, have you forgotten that Ketis is a mech designer as well as a swordmaster? She combines both knowledge and martial skill to excel in both of her professions."

His daughter still did not seem receptive to the idea. She had never been the academic sort, which Ves attributed to the designer genes that influenced her behavior. She showed much greater enthusiasm towards practicing her combat skills.

He sighed. His second daughter could be incorrigible at times.

"What do you think about hypers, papa? I bet you know much more about these weird materials than those snooty scientists."

"I wouldn't say that." Ves responded with a chuckle. "I have my own theories, and I am pretty confident in them. That said, I am merely a Senior Mech Designer. I don't have enough credentials to claim that my views are true. In my opinion, hyper materials are neither the remains of long-dead beings of great power, nor possess any special properties in other dimensions. Hypers exist because I believe that there may be a touch of life in them, however faint."

"Huh?" Andraste looked astonished.

This was a much more radical theory than the ones circulating on the galactic net!

Even Alexa did a double take upon hearing this strange theory.

"My design philosophy is derived from yours, but I have not observed any form of life from the hypers that I have come into contact with." The female Journeyman responded. "Do you have any proof that can substantiate your personal theory?"

She was being remarkably polite. If she heard this theory from anyone else, she may have responded a lot harsher.

Scientists were not supposed to let their biases and feelings dictate the truth!

Only solid observations, logical theories and undeniable empirical data should determine whether a theory was viable enough to become accepted by the scientific community!

Though Ves considered himself to be an authentic scientist, he often found it difficult to abide by all of the rules.

"I can't provide any proof that would satisfy anyone." Ves plainly admitted. "I cannot claim to have sensed any actual life in every hyper material. My theory is merely the product of a couple of hunches combined with a number of spurious logical inferences. It is difficult to explain my reasoning without sounding crazy or delusional, so you don't have to take my word for it. In fact, I encourage you to conduct your own research and build your own theories. No matter whether they match my theories or not, at least you are making progress into developing your own unique contributions to society."

They did not persist in this talk. The nature and origin of hypers was a hotly debated topic that never seemed to end. It was pointless for the two of them to debate on this matter.

They soon turned their attention back to the floating metal bar that comprised a refined hyper material.

"According to virtual documents attached to this container, this is an experimental new hyper material that is made by alloying multiple different hypers and exotics together. It is derived from a single formula out of a series of hundreds of similar formulas. This is one of the more successful outcomes. The prices for the component materials are lower than the expected market price for this hyper alloy."

"What is it called?"

"It currently bears the name HHH-3432134-34REFRFF-3535-NEF. The laboratory responsible for developing the associated formulas has yet to bestow a proper name to this hyper alloy."

Ves twitched his lips when he heard that. It was not unusual for new materials to bear an awfully long codename that was incredibly unwieldy to use in verbal communication.

"Andraste."

"Yes, papa?"

"Before I ask Alexa to summarize the known attributes and effects of this alloy, I want you to take a good look at this piece of metal. Can you use your senses to guess its properties?"

"I can't. I am too far away."

"Use Yaika's senses instead. Her nature as a companion spirit should make her a lot more sensitive towards hyper materials. Let me give you a tip. Try and observe the changes in E energy radiation."

As a hyper material, HHH-3432134-34REFRFF-3535-NEF most definitely had an effect on the E energy radiation that flowed in its vicinity. It wouldn't be a hyper material if it did not induce any E energy reactions.

Yaika, having just finished a quick bath, tried to extend her underdeveloped senses to ascertain what was taking place.

Not every E energy element became attracted to the hyper alloy bar. Only a few of them showed abnormal signs. The remaining E energy that possessed unrelated attributes continued to sail away as if there was nothing in their way.

"Maaw. Maaw."

"My companion spirit senses darkness." The young girl spoke. "She also feels cold. There is also noise, no, the opposite of noise. It is quiet. Cold. Not dead. It was never alive in the first place."

"Alexa?"

"HHH-3432134-34REFRFF-3535-NEF and its related alloy formulas are developed by a research institution affiliated with the Red Ocean. The purpose of this formula series is to develop an artificial hyper substance that can be used as substitutes of high-grade exotics in the development of stealth mechs. It tries to do so by combining multiple related attributes together to produce a higher-level compound effect."

"It seems that the research institution has failed to achieve its primary objective." Ves stated.

"That is so, but the alloy formula still holds value. It is at least capable of producing the effects of three hyper materials while taking the space of only two hyper materials. That is useful in itself, so the company responsible for developing this alloy is in the process of turning it into a commercial product."

This was a common occurrence in the materials sector. A lot of mech designers and material scientists tried to develop powerful new wonder materials, but rarely succeeded. Most of their experiments either produced outright failures or partial successes. The developers often chose to recoup their losses as much as possible by converting the latter into products. There were always people out there that might have enough use for something that was originally supposed to be an unqualified result.

"Do you think that this alloy is a good fit for the planned destructive phasing module?"

"Clearly not." Alexa immediately shook her head. "HHH-3432134-34REFRFF-3535-NEF is a viable option for the development of a stealth mech. It can also be applied to the overall frame of the Dark Zephyr Mark III to reduce the expert light skirmisher's emissions, which will make it harder for enemies to track and lock onto the machine. However, I would not choose this hyper material for this purpose. There are more suitable alternatives that can increase the performance of the Dark Zephyr."

"I agree. This alloy is useless for my current purpose. Let's put it back and check out the contents of the other crates."